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## **CONCEPTS AND SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ILLNESS AND HEALING IN SELECTED NIGERIAN GOSPEL SONGS**

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### **Abstract**

The Nigerian gospel music presents different themes which reflect the realities of the musicians' experiences within the context of their existence. One of the themes that feature in the song text of the Nigerian gospel music is that of illness and healing for which concepts and symbols exist. Adopting the cultural hermeneutical method and borrowing from social representation theory, this paper examines the concepts and symbolic representations of illness and healing in selected Nigerian gospel songs. It is discovered that gospel musicians have evolved certain terminologies for illness and healing in the individual, corporate and Nigerian national life. Illness is thus viewed not only as absence of physical or bodily wellness, or being infected with diseases, but also considered as any form of disorder, disability, inadequacy, crisis or absence of certain things in individual, community or national life, which reflects in the spiritual, economic, social and political lives of the people. Healing is considered as the restoration of the disorder or provision of the things lacked. It is our conclusion in this paper that the Nigerian gospel music is a social commodity, which influences, and is influenced by the realities of its existence, hence, it has the capacity to adapt to the social realities and generate concepts to appropriately describe them.

**Keywords:** Gospel music, Illness, Healing, Symbolic representation, Songs

### **Introduction**

Current trends as evident in music performance and patronage in Nigeria, reveal that religious music of which gospel music is one, has become a force to reckon with (Adeola, 2016, p. 240). This musical genre which has become popular, engages various themes in the content of the song texts, reflecting the social, political, economic and religious realities of the context of the musicians' existence. Some of the themes

that feature in the Nigerian gospel music include that of illness and healing which forms the subject of this paper. The reference to social, political and economic disorders in the Nigerian society, as sickness and the suggestions towards putting in place of systems and structures to remedy the disorder as processes of healing, depict the contemporary and adaptive nature of Nigerian gospel music. According to Hastings (1979, p. 60) "African concepts of health and sickness were an absolutely integral part of the single mesh of social structure and religious consciousness inside which people lived unhesitatingly". This means that the gospel musicians being part of the society, and affected by the realities of their existence in the society, develops their own ideas and views of these realities molded by their religious inclination and express them in songs. This paper therefore examines the concepts and symbolic representations of illness and healing in selected Nigerian gospel songs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This discussion in this paper hinges on social representation theory for its foregrounding. The term "social representation" was originally coined by Moscovici (1961) as "the collective elaboration of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating" This theory according to Wikipedia (retrieved on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2018) asserts that "A social representation is a stock of values, ideas, metaphors, beliefs, and practices that are shared among the members of groups and communities". The relevance of this theory to our discussion on concepts and symbolic representations of illness and healing in selected Nigerian gospel Music Songs is that the experience of the people have made them to develop ideas and concepts which have come to be generally acceptable to describe and represent the realities of their existence.

Gospel music generally, is a branch of Christian music employed essentially for the proclamation of the Christian message and the singing of the praise of God. Nigerian Gospel music is conceived by Adegbite (1994, pp. 83 - 94) as "a new type of church music brought about by the move of religious fanaticism which has resulted in the proliferation of Christian churches in Nigerian society". The reaction of Olatunji, Babalola and Daramola (2011, pp. 153 – 154) to Adegbite's view is that

neither Pentecostalism nor gospel music could be viewed as being fanatical in concept and mode of operation. They however, agree with Adegbite's submission that the growth and development of gospel music is a consequence of the proliferation of Christian churches in Nigeria.

We are of the opinion that Adegbite's use of 'religious fanaticism' is in the context of the Pentecostal movement of the 1970s and 1980s which carry a kind of revolt against orthodoxy. This revolt was reflected not only in liturgy, but also in doctrine and music. Our position is further substantiated by Emielu's (2010, pp. 292 – 293) submission that:

Pentecostal theology reached Nigeria through a process of cultural diffusion. Its growth and spread can be viewed against a backdrop of African resistance to orthodoxy as well as the need to infuse vital African elements in Christian religious music.

Emielu (2010, p.293) citing Babalola (2003, p.29) asserts that African Pentecostalism can be appreciated against this backdrop:

Many of the things European missionaries rejected and termed devilish, are now being used to the glory of God in these Pentecostal churches... Sekere, drums and local tambourine.

To a great extent revolt against orthodoxy was fanatical and it was out of this that the Nigeria gospel music developed. We therefore conceive Nigerian Gospel music in this work as the Christian branch of religious music employed for the purpose of propagating the gospel of Christ to non-Christians, and edifying the believers through its performance in both strict religious context (in the church) and social/entertainment context (outside the church) which has been made popular by the electronic media, technology and its performance (Adeola, 2016, p. 246).

Illness is defined herein as a state of disorder or dysfunction which is manifested in physical, psychological, spiritual, political, economical and social lives of the people. Illness indicates a state of lack of physical or bodily health; lack of or malfunctioning of structures in

governance or individual's life, as well as absence of anything that is considered necessary and good for human existence. Healing is the process and methods of rectifying or restoring the various disorders identified as illness to normalcy.

### **Gospel Musician's Perception of Illness and Healing**

Illness is perceived by the Nigerian gospel musicians either as a temporary or permanent damage that has been caused to individuals or the country as a result of personal carelessness, leadership selfishness, individual godlessness and national sinfulness. It is believed that the sins committed by a nation is capable of bringing illness to the nation. The use of symbolic representations by the musicians relating the subject of illness to various aspects of individual, communal and national lives implies that several things, issues or situations are referred to or regarded as illnesses from which individuals and the society have to be healed. Some examples of things for which people require healing are sin, poverty, laziness, hunger, political instability, economic failure and crisis, social disorder or evil in the society, set back of any kind in business, academics, corruption, and religious unrest. Physical or bodily infirmities and sicknesses are also referred to and presented in form of prayer songs requesting that God will not allow sickness to afflict them or pray that it be taken away if it already occurred. One can conclude that in the mind of the gospel musicians, illness is considered not only in terms of loss of physical health which will require medical attention, but also in terms of things not working as it should be in individual's life, communal and national lives. It is looked at as a state of disorder, hardship, suffering, chaos, poverty and other negative things that befall a person, community or nation which requires spiritual or divine healing as well as political, economic and social rebirth to bring about the needed healing or liberation.

Healing is perceived by the gospel musicians simply as the restoration, repair, recovery or divine intervention that brings relief from all the pains and other consequences of the illness. For some illnesses, healing is considered to have taken place when provision is made for the things that were lacked. For example, healing comes for joblessness the day that the one plagued with the ailment of joblessness gets a job. While

in other cases, it is considered in terms of termination of some things such as removal of leaders perceived as evil or wicked. It is also considered in terms of restoration of things such as physical health, wealth, joy, peace to a nation and such other things.

An examination of a song by Are (1990) gives insight into the gospel musician's perception of illness and healing:

**SÙGBÓN KAN NÍ BE LÁYÉ MI**

**Chorus:** Sùgbón kan ní be láyé mi

**Solo:** Èmi kò fé e mó látóní lo  
Oba tó wo sùgbón Jábésì  
Wo sùgbón ayé mi  
Àilówó lówó, sùgbón ni  
Àìrómobí sùgbon  
Gbèsè àti àgbàná, sùgbón ni  
Àìtegbé ní kó?  
Àìréni-boni-lásiírí  
Ìsòro àtódúmódún  
O ní sisébí erin  
Ò ní jèje ilírí  
Àilóko gidi  
Àiláya rere  
Àilówó lówó,  
Èmí èsè nínú ayé re  
lówó sugbon ni  
Ài tégbé nkó  
Ó je tǎárò kò sí talé

Àilálááfíà ní kó?  
Àikólé nkó?  
Jésù jòwó ràn mí lówó  
Kójú ó t'elégàn mi láyé  
Oba tó wo sùgbón Jábésì

Wo sùgbón ayé mi

**TRANSLATION**

There is a (predicament) "but" in my life  
I do not want it from today henceforth  
The king who healed Jabesh's but  
Heal the predicament in my life  
Poverty is a predicament  
Childlessness is a predicament  
Debt and waste  
Not measuring up to one's equal  
Not getting help  
Persistent problems  
Working like an elephant  
But eating like a tiny ant  
Not having a responsible husband  
Not having a good wife  
Not having money  
The spirit of sin in your life Àinisé  
Joblessness  
Not measuring up to one's equal  
Eating breakfast and unable to eat dinner  
Not having good health  
Inability to build a house  
Jesus please help me  
Let my mockers be put to shame  
The king who healed Jabesh's "but" (predicament)  
Heal the but (predicament) in my life

The above song is based on the Biblical story of Jabesh recorded in 1Chronicles 4:9 -10), who was named a "child of sorrow" because of the circumstances surrounding his birth, and as a result, was not prospering and was plagued by evil. This was implied in his prayer as follows: "And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand

might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me..." (1 Chronicles 4: 10 KJV) Everything was turned around positively for him after he prayed to God. Are based in Ibadan, Oyo State, known for her unique style of songs, is one of the leading female gospel musicians in Nigeria, whose music is characterized by praise, prayer and Biblical references, executed mainly through call and response, strophic responsorial and through composed forms. Are used figurative and symbolic expression in the above song to paint the picture of illness and healing.

"*Sugbon*" which literally means "but" is referred to in this song as a question mark, limitation or inadequacy in a person's life that needs to be healed by God. The illness which can manifest in form of poverty, not being able to feed well, joblessness, barrenness, and difficulty in getting a wife or husband, is being presented in form of a but (need or problem) to be healed by God.

Reference to healing in this song is specifically in the last two lines of the chorus, even though all those things listed as "*Sugbon*" (but) are things for which healing is required. "*Ọba tó wo sùgbón Jábésì, wo sùgbón aiyé mí*" (The king who healed Jabesh's "but" heal the "but" in my life). The term king is usually used in reference to God, and this is obvious because the story being referred to says, "And Jabesh called on the God of Israel...And God granted him that which he requested" (2 Chronicles.4:10a KJV) "*Wo*" in this song means heal. In the Yoruba context of traditional medicine "*wò*" can also literally mean look after or take care of, all in the context of healing. "*wò*" from the Yoruba word "*ìwòsàn*" (healing) or "*wòsàn*" (heal) is used in the overall context of the need for healing or restoration. Healing homes exist among the Yoruba where people perceived to have physical or psychological ailments are taken for care and healing through the use of traditional medicine, and this method of healing has been effective. In this song, the previous state of Jabesh before he prayed to God is regarded as illness, and after he prayed, he was healed and consequently became prosperous and more honourable than his brethren. The same picture is being painted in this song by Are that, one who is poor, jobless, childless, without a wife or husband though one is of age, or even one who is married but the spouse is not responsible or doing well, sick and needs the healing that will turn

around those negative situations. Reference is also made to lack of sound health in the song. "Àilálàfià" (lack of good health) is considered a 'but' that needs to be healed.

Another song by late Bayo Adegboyega also gives us an insight into the gospel musicians' concept of illness and healing. An excerpt is cited below:

**IRE OWÓ, OMO, ÀLÁÁFIÀ**

**Chorus:** Má fì kan gbà kan lówó mi

Ire owó, omo, àlááfià ni mò ñ fé o

**Solo:** Bówó bá ti dé, kómo má mà kú

Bówó bá ti wà, ká lálàáfià

Báfinisùn bá fejó mi sùn ó

Bàbá mí mó má se gbó o

Kókóró olá, kókóró iyè

Owó Olórun lo mà wà

Èdá, yéé lérí mo

Nígba tí Olórun ti jù ó lo

Alèpara-má-lè-pokàn mi ò gbára lé o mó

Nípa ìgbàgbó o, Olúwa yóó sèyí tó dára

**All:** Repeat Chorus

**Solo:** Wáhálà, idààmú, ipónjú,

mo mà ñ fé kó dópín

Àseèrí, àsedànù, àgbàná, kó dohùn ìgbàgbé

Àránsí, àsàsí ayé ò, kélérù kó forí gbé

Èmí mí mó kó tó mi sònà láti sèfé Olórun

Olórun mi, jàré tó mi sònà

Ìràwò mi lo lé òtá gbé ládugbó rodòthe

Ìràwò mi ló yo o asebi fa korobá lówó

**TRANSLATION**

Do not give one and take another  
Money, children and health are the  
blessings I want

My child should not die when I  
become rich

When I have children let me have  
sound health

When the accuser reports me to you  
Holy father do not listen

Key to wealth, key to life  
Are in the hand of God

The creature should stop bragging  
Because God is greater than you

I no longer trust the one  
who can kill the soul

By faith the Lord will do that  
which is good

Problems, troubles and tribulation,  
I want them to come to an end

Fruitless labour, wasteful efforts  
Wasteful spending.

the wicked one should be the one to  
bear his wickedness

the holy Spirit to direct me to do  
the will of God

my God please guide me aright  
enemy carries a bucket at the sight  
of my star

My star is shining and the wicked  
one carries a water jar

E bá mi kilò fùn kénimámàní  
Ìràwò mi kò seé bómi pa

Help me warn the envious one that  
my star cannot be quenched with  
water

All: Repeat Chorus

The importance of good health and the need for its sustenance is emphasized in the above song by late Bayo Adegboyega. The song also rendered in form of a prayer suggests three blessings that the humans hope for and can receive from God. "Owó" (money or wealth); "Omo" (Children) and "Àlàfià" (Good health). These three things are considered very important and anyone who lacks any of these is considered incomplete, deficient, afflicted or cursed. The prayer request in the song is that none of these three will be missing in one's life. "Alafia" (Good health) among the Yoruba is described as "Baálẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀" (Chief of wealth or riches) or "Ipẹ̀kun ọ̀rọ̀" (The height of wealth or riches) meaning that one is unable to enjoy any other form of wealth if "Alafia" (Good health) is missing.

In the second verse of the song, reference is made to specific problems that can befall a man for which healing has to be sought. "Wahala" (Troubles), "Idamu" (Chaos), "Iponju" (Tribulation), "Ase iri" (Fruitless labour), "Asedanu" (Wasteful efforts), "Agbana" (Wasteful spending) are examples of what healing is required. Hence, the prayer in the song is that all of these should come to an end. "Baba je ko dopin" (Father let it come to an end) is a plea to God for healing.

The above songs by Are and Adegboyega give us insight into the gospel musicians' perception of illness as a state of disorder, inadequacy, lack, limitation, sinfulness, suffering, poverty, and physical ailments. And healing is the removal, redress or restoration of the abnormal situations. This agrees with Mechanic's (1968, p. 84) definition of disease as some deviation from normal functioning, which has undesirable consequences because it produces personal discomfort, or adversely affects the individual's future health status. One may then draw a conclusion that any unusual or abnormal situation which can be sudden, persistent, temporary or permanent, or any situation that brings disgrace, hindrances, limitations or other undesirable consequences in the life of a person, group of persons or nation is a form of illness. Healing is simply a restoration of the abnormal situation to normalcy.

### **Concepts and Perceptions of Illness and Healing**

Gospel musicians, borrowing ideas from their various cultures, general societal expressions and biblical language, give symbolic representations of illness and healing in their music. Some of these symbolic representations of illness are expressed either through the use of words, terms, or descriptions of situations. Describing patterns of healing in Africa, Hastings (1979, p.60) submits as follows:

No society can operate without both a theory of sickness and a practice of medicine, and African societies have certainly been no exception. Faced with illness of one sort and another, human beings need both something practical to do, and a wider philosophy of explanation which renders ill health, bereavement and every form of misfortune somehow tolerable by establishing it within a wider frame of reference. By explaining things one can be helped to cope by forces of social therapy and religious ritual which need not in any way affect the actual physical state of affairs, but rather reconcile individuals and community to factors beyond their control.

It is observed that, it is a general concept in Nigerian gospel songs that a state of disorder, discomfort, something being wrong or lack of wellness physically, politically, economically, socially or religiously is regarded as illness. Absence of basic comforts in the country and in individual lives is all regarded as illness. Illness is associated with negativity manifested in the various dimensions of human life and healing is associated with order, restoration and positivism. This is illustrated in the next excerpt from the song "Ilu le Koko" by Adegboyega (1987)

#### **ÌLÚ LE KOKO**

##### **Chorus:**

Ìlú le koko o, Olórun wá sòlú dèrò  
Ká rí jẹ, ká rí mu, ká rí ná, ká rí lò  
Ká rówó fí sìn ọ  
Olórun wá sòlú dèrò

#### **THE COUNTRY IS DIE HARD TRANSLATION**

The country is very hard, God come and soften it  
Let us have enough to eat, drink, spend and use  
Let us have money to serve you  
God come and soften the country

According to Ikorok (2003, p. 518 – 525) Good health, like every good thing, is believed to come from God. Any deviation from this optimal situation is conceived as illness... Hunger, suffering, instability,

failure, killing, vices, poverty, set back, lack of any kind are some examples of symbolic representations of illness in gospel music.

Adeniyi (2003, p. 546), citing Afonja, noted that the material poverty of Nigerians is intricately linked with the poor state of health care system which cannot be significantly alleviated unless there is improvement in the health care status of the people. "Repair", "bring to an end", "remove", "restore", "rebuild", "promote", "deliver", "lift", "make alive", "revive" are some expressions that are symbolic for healing in gospel songs. Examples of the symbolic representations of illness and healing in Nigerian gospel music are given in the excerpt of songs by Adegboyega (1986) cited below:

**ÀÌRÍNÁ, ÀÌRÍLÒ, OLÚWA JÉ KÓ DÓPIN**

**LACK, LORD, LET IT COME TO AN END**

**TRANSLATION**

Ipá èsù gbogbo kó dópín x 2

Àìríná, àìrílò tò wà nígboro

Àìrise, àìrije tò gbayé kan

Èmí òkùnkùn tí ń gbéraga níwájú ìmólè

Isé èsù ni, á fẹ́ kó pin

All of Satan's power should cease

Poverty, lack that is prevalent in the town  
Joblessness, hunger that has overtaken the world

The spirit of darkness that brags before the light

It is the work of the Satan, we want it to cease

"Airina" (Poverty), "Airilo" (Lack), "Airise" (Joblessness), "Airije" (Hunger) are symbolic representations in this song that shows a state of things not being right. They are negative things for which prayer is being offered to God to bring to an end. "A fẹ́ kó pin" (We want it to end) is a desire for the illness that comes in form of poverty, lack, and joblessness to stop, just as one who is physically ill will pray for restoration.

The next excerpt is from the song titled "Bá mi t'áyé mi se Olúwa" (Help me to repair my life Lord) by Àrẹ (1987)

**BÁ MI TÁYÉ MI SE OLÚWA**

**HELP ME TO REPAIR MY LIFE**

**TRANSLATION**

Chorus: Tún un se, tún un se

Mo gbáyé mi tò ó wá o, tún un se

Solo: Kábiyèsí o mo gbáyé mi tò ó wa o

All: Tún un se

Repair it, repair it

I bring my life to you, repair it

The Unquestionable, I bring my life to you

Repair it

Solo: Oluwa mo gbókọ mi tò ọ wá o  
Kábíyèsí, mo gbáya mi tò ọ wá o

Olódùmarè mo gbélé mi tò ọ wa o

Kábíyèsí ò, mo gbómọ mi tò ọ wá o

Baba ò, mo gbóri mi tò ọ wá o  
Olúwa ò, mo gbésé mi tò ọ wá o  
Bàbá mo gbáyé mi tò ọ wá o

Lord, I bring my husband to you  
The Unquestionable I bring my wife to  
you  
owner of the universe I bring my home  
to you  
The Unquestionable I bring my child to  
you  
Father I bring my head to you  
Lord I bring my work to you  
Father I bring my life to you

The excerpt above illustrates a symbolic representation of healing. *Tun se* (Repair) is used in this song to represent the kind of healing that is required, and the type of things that can require healing. These include human life represented in “*Ayé mī*” (My Life), “*Ọkọ*” (Husband), “*Aya*” (Wife), “*Ilé*” (Home or Family), “*Ọmọ*” (Child) “*Orí*” (Head), and other things that affect human life like “*Isẹ*” (Job). To repair as it is being requested in this song is to restore or remove what is wrong, so that there will be good function, as expected. For example, in the above song, when a man’s life is void of the expected comforts, but plagued with problems, failures or other forms of calamity, it is believed that such a life needs a repair. When a husband, a wife or child is not behaving well or measuring up to the expectations of the wife, the husband or parents respectively, repairs are required in such a person.

## Cultural and Religious Manifestations of Illness and Healing in Contemporary Nigerian Gospel Songs

### Cultural Manifestations

Manifestations of illness and healing are seen and given expressions and interpretations in the context of the people’s traditional and religious beliefs and practices. Illness or healing is said to have occurred when there are certain manifestations in the human life, or in the society. These manifestations can be sensed and expressed physically and metaphysically.

In the traditional African setting, illnesses are believed to occur not only as a result of physical occurrences such as environmental pollution and hunger, but also through metaphysical means which could be as a result of the operations of some wicked people, or anger of the

gods. According to Hastings (1979, p.60-67) it is common place for, Africans to regularly explain deaths (at least the death of any except very old) and unexpected misfortune in terms of spiritual causes. They did not deny that there is a natural causality of sickness, caused by body simply breaking down, or coming into contact with dangerous physical substance... When there are plagues, outbreaks of sickness, natural disasters, crisis, persistent calamities, persistent deaths, instability, prevalence of poverty, and so on, it is believed that the supernatural is involved. At such moments, efforts are made to placate the angry gods or goddesses, and prayers are said to the Christian God for restoration. Aluede (2005, p. 93) in his discussion on healing in traditional African belief and modern day Pentecostal churches states as follows:

Critically speaking, in the two belief systems – Christianity and African religion, disease is generally accepted to be caused and allowed by God, just as healing is also permitted by him. In Isaiah 19:22, Deuteronomy 32:39 and Acts of the apostles 9:8, 17 and 18 evidences abound that God smites and heals, God makes alive, wounds and heals, made Paul blind and consequently healed him. In these two religions, poverty, barrenness, not being able to find a spouse, spending so much money on inconsequential issues is also seen as sickness.

The above statement by Aluede gives an insight into some cultural and contemporary religious interpretations of illness which are evident in Nigerian gospel music. The perception of the gospel musicians about illness and healing is certainly influenced by these two traditions – African tradition within which they grow and the Christian tradition which they accept at some points in their lives. Attributing illness and healing to the supernatural is a common manifestation in the Nigerian gospel music; therefore God is called upon for divine intervention even in matters that are physical as seen in the songs analysed. This is a manifestation of the musician's religiosity.

### **Religious Manifestations**

In the religious sense, certain manifestations are also symptomatic of disorder or disconnection with the supernatural which physically is conceived as illness, and when there is restoration of order, whether in the society or in the human life, then, healing has occurred.

In the contemporary religious setting, illness manifests in all kinds of negative ways. This indicates that all is not well with the individual community or nation that experiences such calamities. When Christians pray about a situation for so long, and nothing seems to happen, something is believed to have gone wrong spiritually, as such, divine intervention is sought. For example, the manifestations of poverty, failure, sudden or persistent calamity are considered the result of a curse, anger of God or the work of evil men which can only be matched by a greater spiritual power. In contemporary religious setting, physical illness is also believed among the Pentecostals, not to be mere physical but having a spiritual undertone. The devil is believed to be behind every form of illnesses through the activities of demons. Even clear medical issues are associated to demonic attacks which, according to them, is contrary to God's desire for them to be in good health at all times. Therefore, it is a common thing to hear about casting out the demons that are behind the various forms of physical illness. Healing and miracle services are conducted in churches also for this purpose. Healing is believed to have taken place as soon as the demons are exorcised.

The cultural and contemporary religious manifestations of illness and healing in the Nigerian gospel music is, thus, evident in the general belief that any form of disorder is an indication of illness which requires intervention that will bring about healing. The fact that the gospel musicians lay claim to Christianity and the power of God to heal does not prevent indications in their songs that the African tradition within which they have grown, and which had a pattern of handling illnesses before Christianity came, does subsist even up till now. This consciousness makes the gospel musicians present miraculous healing in Jesus name as the superior method for healing all manners of illnesses identified by them in their songs.

Divine healing through prayer and faith in Jesus Christ, who is called the great physician, is propagated through gospel music as the authentic source and means of healing from physical illness. It is a feature in Nigerian gospel music to infer or imply that the use of other means or sources like traditional medicine does not bring the desired solution for healing. The use of "Ewé" (leaves/herbs) and "Egbò" (roots) is seen as unchristian and as such, not encouraged because it is believed

to involve the invocation of other power or spirits that are anti-Christ. For example, the Good Women Choir of the Christ Apostolic Church, Ibadan (1987) in one of their songs titled "Jeki 'nu mi ma dun" (Let my heart always be glad) referred to this when they said:

Òpò n léwé légbò

Kò sì máyò won kún

Ìwo tí n sorísun ayò

Ló lè máyò won kún

Many use leaves/herbs

And it does not make their joy full

It is you who is the source of joy

That can make their joy full

The same thing is implied by the C.A.C. Good Women Choir (1983) in the song "Agbára Jésù jagbára won lọ" (The power of Jesus is more than their power) an excerpt of it goes as follows:

Agbára Jésù, Ó jagbára won lo 2ce

Agbára jèsù, ó jagbára won lo

Ó jagbára ayé, ó jagbára egbò

Ó jagbára ifá, ó jagbára òpèlè

Agbára Jésù, ó jagbára won lo

The power of Jesus is more than their power

The power of Jesus is more than their power

It is more than the power of leaves and herbs

It is more than the power of Ifa and Opele

The power of Jesus is more than their power

The summary of these excerpts is that leaves and herbs used by some people who trust in them do not bring the desired healing which should result in the fullness of such people's joy. Ifa is also said in the song not to be as powerful as Jesus Christ. God is referred to as 'the source of joy' who alone can bring the desired fullness of joy.

It should be observed that the use of herbs which is condemned by the gospel musicians as reflected in the excerpts above is considered by some Christian sects who believe in the use of herbs an extreme position which contradicts God's provision for mankind as recorded in Genesis 1: 11-12. In Genesis 1:29 the Bible categorically states as follows: "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat". This implies that God created the herbs for the use of mankind, and therefore using it for healing is considered appropriate. However, blending fetish or diabolic activities with the use of herbs is not acceptable.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion in this paper has focused on the concepts and symbolic representations of illness and healing in selected Nigerian gospel song texts. It has been established that themes of illness and healing constitute subjects of discourse in the Nigerian gospel music, and that the gospel musicians in Nigeria have concepts and symbolic representations used in describing illness and healing, which is greatly influenced and shaped by the cultural, social and religious context of the existence of the musicians. Gospel musicians borrowing ideas from their various cultures, general societal expressions and biblical language give symbolic representations of illness and healing in their music. Some of these symbolic representations of illness are expressed, either through the use of words, terms, or descriptions of situations.

General disorder, misfortune or bodily sickness in the individual or societal life is regarded as illness reflected in gospel songs with expressions like "Sùgbón" (but); "Àiríná" (Poverty); "Àirílò" (Lack); "Àirísé" (Joblessness); "Àiríjẹ" (hunger), while healing is simply conceived as restoration. Words like "Repair", "bring to an end", "remove", "restore", "rebuild", "promote", "deliver", "lift", "make alive", "revive" are some expressions that are symbolic for healing in gospel songs.

The Nigerian gospel musicians have become crusaders of good life and wellbeing for the Nigerian society, as their music has lent itself to campaign for a good life for individuals and the general society, through the identification of things, that are wrong and needs to be corrected, as well as giving spiritual solutions and suggestions of other means of rectifying the problems. It is our conclusion in this paper that the Nigerian gospel music is a social commodity which influences and is influenced by the realities of its existence, hence, it has the capacity to adapt to the social realities and generate concepts to appropriately describe them.

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